

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 EB-08 AGRE-00 NEA-10 EUR-12 SIL-01 LAB-04
COME-00 TRSE-00 AID-05 CU-02 /099 W
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R 050530Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6900
INFO AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
AMEMBASSY VICTORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PORT LOUIS 0823

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PGOV ELAB SCUL MP UR FR MILI MA SEDU US MARR
EAGR
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW - AUGUST 5

REF: PORT LOUIS 805

SUMMARY/ PORT LOUIS 0822 (NOTAL) PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF
THIS CABLE. END SUMMARY

1. SINCE HIS RETURN TO MAURITIUS JULY 19 PRIME MINISTER
RAMGOOLAM HAS BEEN ILL ON-AND-OFF ALMOST CONTINUOUSLY,
AND HAS BEEN STAYING AT HOME TO REST, AVOIDING ALL BUT
THE MOST PRESSING BUSINESS. FINANCE MINISTER RINGADOO
HAS BEEN STANDING IN FOR HIM BOTH AT CEREMONIAL FUNCTIONS
AND AT THE HELM OF GOVERNMENT. PERSONS CLOSE TO THE
PRIME MINISTER NEVERTHELESS SAY THAT THE COMPLETE
MEDICAL CHECK-UP HE UNDERWENT IN BRITAIN SHOWED NO
SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS.

2. THE PRESS HERE HAS PICKED UP AN INTERVIEW WITH
RAMGOOLAM PUBLISHED BY THE CHARLESTON (WEST VIRGINIA)
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GAZETTE ON JUNE 7. IN THE INTERVIEW (WHICH WAS GRANTED
PRIOR TO THE SEYCHELLES COUP) RAM EXPRESSED CONCERN
ABOUT "EXTERNAL PRESSURE" WHICH WAS BEING EXERTED "TO
UNDO THE WORK FOR FREEDOM IN MAURITIUS, IN SEYCHELLES
AND SOME OTHER NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES." THE PRIME
MINISTER DESCRIBED DIEGO GARCIA AS A "BUGBEAR" FOR THE
GOM AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE U.S. WOULD WITHDRAW

FROM THE BASE OR AT LEAST REDUCE ITS PRESENCE THERE. HE SAID THE GOM WANTS BOTH THE U.S. AND THE USSR TO WITHDRAW THEIR NAVAL PRESENCES FROM THIS PART OF THE WORLD. AT THE SAME TIME HE ASKED FOR INCREASED U.S. SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENTS LIKE HIS OWN WHICH ARE TRYING TO PRESERVE FREEDOM IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. (THE LOCAL PRESS HAS SPECULATED THAT DEMILITARIZATION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN WILL BE THE PRINCIPAL PREOCCUPATION OF THE MAURITIAN DELEGATION TO THE 32ND UNGA. THE DELEGATION WILL BE HEADED BY RAMGOOLAM.)

3. IN A SPEECH TO A LABOR PARTY RALLY IN PORT LOUIS, FOREIGN MINISTER WALTER USED HARSH WORDS ABOUT PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA OF MADAGASCAR, SAYING HE IS UNABLE TO ATTEND CONFERENCES ABROAD FOR FEAR OF BEING OVERTHROWN, AND HE NEVER TRAVELS WITHIN HIS COUNTRY WITHOUT A LARGE ARMED ESCORT. TO THOSE WHO WANT TO TURN MAURITIUS INTO A "LITTLE CUBA," SIR HAROLD REMARKED THAT CUBA USED TO PRODUCE 12 MILLION TONS OF SUGAR A YEAR BUT SINCE CASTRO IT PRODUCES ONLY A THIRD THAT AMOUNT. HE ADDED THAT MAURITIUS CANNOT SELL ITS SUGAR TO THE SOVIET UNION BECAUSE THAT COUNTRY PAYS FOR ITS PURCHASES WITH ARMS, AND MAURITIUS HAS NO USE FOR ARMS. WALTER ADVOCATED CONTINUING CLOSE TIES WITH THE AFRICAN CONTINENT, THE OAU AND THE OCAM TO ASSURE MAURITIUS' POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.
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4. DESPITE THE APPARENTLY "FRIENDLY" SIGNING OF A RENEWAL OF THE SOVIET-MAURITIAN CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC AGREEMENT LAST WEEK (REFTEL), RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES HAVE NOT IMPROVED. FOREIGN MINISTER WALTER TOLD THE AMBASSADOR ON JULY 31 THAT SOVIET AMBASSADOR SAFRONOV IS BEING TRANSFERRED AFTER ONLY 16 MONTHS AT POST, THOUGH HIS DEPARTURE LAST WEEK WAS ANNOUNCED AS BEING FOR A TWO MONTH LEAVE IN THE USSR. ACCORDING TO WALTER, PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM BELIEVES THE SOVIET EMBASSY IS OVER-STAFFED WITH INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS WHOSE ROLE IS TO WORK WITH THE MARXIST-ORIENTED OPPOSITION PARTY, THE MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM). WALTER AND RAMGOOLAM BOTH TOLD SAFRONOV THAT HIS EMBASSY, WHICH HAS 32 RUSSIAN NATIONALS ON ITS ROLLS, OUGHT TO BE REDUCED IN SIZE.

5. MMM SECRETARY GENERAL PAUL BERENGER IS PLANNING ANOTHER VISIT TO THE SEYCHELLES, REUNION, THE COMOROS, AND MADAGASCAR. THOUGH THE PURPOSE OF HIS TRIP WAS NOT ANNOUNCED, HE PROBABLY INTENDS TO TRY TO COMPLETE ARRANGEMENTS FOR A CONFERENCE OF "PROGRESSIVE PARTIES"

OF THIS REGION, A PET SCHEME HE HAS BEEN PROMOTING FOR SOME TIME. THE MMM POLITBURO DESIGNATED PARTY PRESIDENT ANEEROOD JUGNAUTH AND BERENGER TO ACCEPT INVITATIONS FOR "OFFICIAL" VISITS TO IRAQ IN SEPTEMBER AND ROMANIA IN OCTOBER. THEY ARE TO DISCUSS WITH THE GOVERNMENTS OF THOSE COUNTRIES POSSIBLE FUTURE CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION "WHEN A MMM GOVERNMENT COMES TO POWER." ACCORDING TO A MMM SPOKESMAN, THEY WILL DISCUSS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ THE POSSIBLY SUPPLY OF PETROLEUM TO MAURITIUS, WHICH NOW IS SUPPLIED BY IRAN. (COMMENT: IN THE PAST BERENGER HAS BEEN THE PARTY'S NEARLY EXCLUSIVE REPRESENTATIVE FOR THESE FOREIGN CONTACTS, BUT FOLLOWING HIS LAST SWING ABROAD IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT IN FUTURE THE PARTY PRESIDENT WOULD ACCOMPANY

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HIM ON SUCH TRIPS. IT IS BELIEVED THAT SOME ELEMENTS IN THE PARTY LEADERSHIP WISH TO LIMIT BERENGER'S FREE-WHEELING ABROAD, OR AT LEAST TO HAVE SOMEONE ALONG TO KEEP AN EYE ON HIM. END COMMENT.)

6. ANOTHER PROMINENT MMM MILITANT, DEOLALL GUNNESH, A SUGAR WORKER AND TRADE UNIONIST, HAS QUIT THE PARTY. A MMM ACTIVIST SINCE 1970, FORMER MEMBER OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND REGIONAL OFFICIAL OF THE MMM SUGAR INDUSTRY WORKERS' UNION, GUNNESH TOLD THE PRESS THAT HIS DEPARTURE WAS CAUSED BY THE DICTATORIAL BEHAVIOR OF THE PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL, PAUL BERENGER, AND THE DOMINATION OF A CLIQUE OF "PETIT BOURGEOIS" INTELLECTUALS IN PLACE OF THE WORKING CLASS IN THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTY. HE DID NOT AGREE WITH A REPORTER WHO SUGGESTED THAT THE MMM IS ANTI-HINDU, BUT HE PREDICTED THAT OTHER MMM MILITANTS WOULD FOLLOW HIS LEAD IN RESIGNING FROM THE PARTY AND ITS TRADE UNIONS. IT WAS CLEAR FROM GUNNESH'S REMARKS THAT HIS DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE PARTY WAS HASTENED AFTER BERENGER "ARRANGED" HIS DEFEAT IN THE LAST CENTRAL COMMITTEE ELECTIONS SO THAT HE COULD BE REPLACED BY A BERENGER "YES MAN," AS HE PUT IT. GUNNESH SAID BERENGER IS NOT A REAL SOCIALIST AND HE DOESN'T SEE WHY BERENGER SHOULD BE THE NEGOTIATOR FOR 47 DIFFERENT TRADE UNIONS.

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7. THE GOVERNMENT REVEALED ITS WAGE INCREASE PROPOSAL THIS WEEK IN THE TRIPARTITE TRADE UNION-EMPLOYERS-GOVERNMENT NEGOTIATIONS (REFTEL). THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL IS FOR INCREASES RANGING FROM 8 TO 3 PERCENT, BASED ON AN AVERAGE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX RISE OF 8 PERCENT DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THIS YEAR COMPARED WITH THE SAME PERIOD LAST YEAR. FINANCE MINISTER RINGADOO TOLD THE PRESS THAT THIS WAS THE MAXIMUM INCREASE POSSIBLE IN VIEW OF THE DIFFICULT ECONOMIC SITUATION OF THE COUNTRY, BUT HE SAID NEGOTIATIONS COULD BE REOPENED LATER IN THE YEAR IF INFLATION RISES STEEPLY. THE GOVERNMENT OFFER WILL COST THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF BETWEEN 75 AND 80 MILLION RUPEES, AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR AN ESTIMATED 154 MILLION RUPEES. THE EMPLOYERS' FEDERATION AND THE NATIONAL TRADE UNION FRONT PROMPTLY REJECTED THE OFFER AS "UNACCEPTABLE" BUT THE NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUE.

8. THE EMPLOYERS SAY THEY CANNOT AFFORD ANY SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN WAGES (WHICH IS PROBABLY TRUE FOR THE EXPORT PROCESSING ZONE INDUSTRIES, AT LEAST)
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UNLESS IT IS TIED TO AN INCREASE IN PRODUCTIVITY AND A REDUCTION IN ABSENTEEISM. THE TRADE UNION FRONT FIRST ASKED FOR A 22 PERCENT ACROSS-THE-BOARD INCREASE, THEN DROPPED DOWN TO A SLIDING SCALE OF 7 TO 18 PERCENT. AND AFTER HEARING RINGADOO'S PROPOSAL HAVE FURTHER LOWERED THEIR DEMANDS BY CALLING FOR AT LEAST AN 11 PERCENT

INCREASE TO COVER LOSS OF PURCHASING POWER OF THE WORKERS IN THE PAST YEAR. THEY HAVE ALSO BEGUN MURMURING ABOUT A STRIKE TO ENFORCE THEIR DEMANDS.

9. IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR, CLEMENT MOOTOO, FORMER HEAD OF THE CIVIL SERVANTS' UNION, SAID A STRIKE IS OUT OF THE QUESTION. MOOTOO SAYS IT TOOK HIM MONTHS OF ORGANIZATION AND CAJOLERY TO GET 80 PERCENT OF HIS MEMBERSHIP TO RESPOND TO A STRIKE CALL IN JUNE 1976 WHICH WAS SUCCESSFUL IN OBTAINING A 24 PERCENT INCREASE FOR CIVIL SERVANTS, AS WELL AS THE PROMISE OF A 40 HOUR WEEK AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERMANENT ARBITRATION BOARD TO IMPOSE WAGE SETTLEMENTS ON BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS EMPLOYEES. MOOTOO BELIEVES THE PRESENT TRADE UNION LEADERSHIP HAS MADE ITSELF RIDICULOUS BY MAKING SUCH EXTREME DEMANDS AT THE START AND THEN RETREATING FROM THEM SO RAPIDLY. HE BELIEVES A STRIKE WOULD BE AN MISERABLE FAILURE. MOOTOO HIMSELF HAS JOINED THE MANAGEMENT CAMP, AS HE IS NOW PERSONNEL OFFICER FOR COCA COLA. IN POLITICS HE FAILED TO WIN AN ASSEMBLY SEAT AS A PMSD CANDIDATE IN DECEMBER, BUT IN APRIL WAS ELECTED TO THE CUREPIPE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, WHERE HE LIKES TO DISAGREE PUBLICLY WITH MAYOR GAETAN DUVAL, LEADER OF HIS PARTY.

10. THE GOVERNMENT'S SUDDEN ACTION OF MAKING SECONDARY EDUCATION FREE, ANNOUNCED ON THE EVE OF THE DECEMBER CONFIDENTIAL

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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, HAS CAUSED A BURGEONING OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOL POPULATION. SIX MONTHS AFTER THE DECISION THE SCHOOLS HAVE ENROLLED AN ADDITIONAL 12,000 STUDENTS, AND A FURTHER INCREASE OF 15,000 IS EXPECTED IN 1978. A NUMBER OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS ARE ADVERTISING RO RENT BUUILDINGS TO HOUSE THESE ADDITIONAL STUDENTS. THE POLICY OF FREE EDUCATION WAS ADOPTED SUDDENLY WITHOUT ANY PREPARATION WHICH HAS CAUSED A GOOD DEAL OF CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT. THUS FAR NO ONE HAS APPARENTLY GIVEN ANY THOUGHT OF THE PROBLEM OF FINDING OR CREATING JOBS FOR ALL THESE EXTRA SCHOOL GRADUATES FIVE, SIX OR SEVEN YEARS FROM NOW, MOST OF WHOM WILL DEMAND WHITE COLLAR JOBS WHICH WILL NOT EXIST UNLESS THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF INDUSTRIAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE MEANTIME.

11. THE INFESTATION OF WHITE LICE WHICH OCCURRED THIS YEAR WILL REDUCE SUGAR PRODUCTION BY 25,000 TONS, OR 3.5 PERCENT OF THE ESTIMATED TOTAL, ACCORDING TO THE SUGAR INDUSTRY RESEARCH INSTITUTE. THE PEST HAS BEEN BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL THROUGH THE USE OF ITS NATURAL

ENEMIES, AND IS NOT CONSIDERED A MAJOR PROBLEM FOR THE FUTURE.

12. THE FRENCH AIRCRAFT CARRIER, "FOCH," SENT TO DJIBOUTI TO HELP DEAL WITH ANY SECURITY PROBLEMS ATTENDING THE NEW NATION'S INDEPENDENCE, HAS BEEN VISITING PORT LOUIS THIS WEEK FOR R AND R. ON BOARD IS THE COMMANDER OF THE FRENCH INDIAN OCEAN FLEET, REAR ADMIRAL DARRIEUS.
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